

TRAINING REPORT

PETER J. CALVO

August 2, 2018

I had the opportunity to participate in the NJSBA School Board Leadership program, which was held on Wednesday, August 1, in Washington Township.

The program was geared toward school board presidents and vice presidents, but open to any board member interested in building their leadership skills. This program explored:

- Legal and moral obligations to provide accurate, timely information that informs the community on the actions boards take and how the district operates.
- Using communication tools to provide insight and drive support for public education in the community.
- Being responsible for ensuring effective communication between all board members and within the school community.
- Being accountable for opening and maintaining clear channels of communication with schools and community as a fundamental building block to developing and maintaining public trust and support.

The program was facilitated by Terri Lewis and Jesse Adams from NJSBA Field Services. I have attached a copy of the agenda, presentation, and additional handouts.





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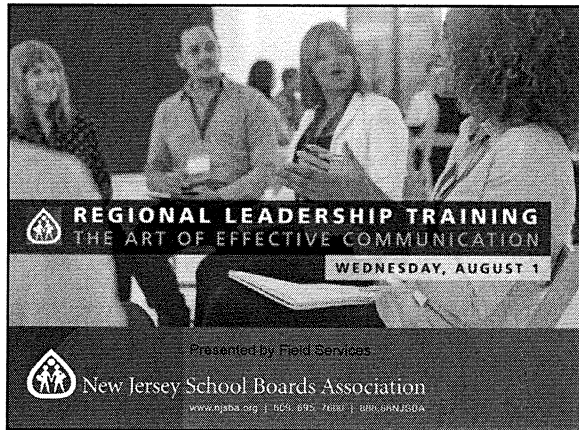
413 West State Street • Trenton, NJ 08618 • Telephone: 609.695.7600 • Toll-Free: 888.88NJSBA • Fax: 609.695.0413

AGENDA

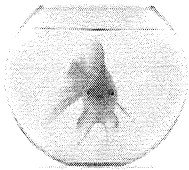
Regional Leadership Training The Art of Effective Communication August 1, 2018

Goals: To identify why communication is important and the role of the board in effectively communicating with their public.

- I. Overview and Introductions**
- II. Dual role of representing schools and community**
- III. Insight into and influence on public opinion of public education**
- IV. Moral and legal obligation to communicate reasons for actions**
- V. Wrap Up and Evaluation**



Why Communication is Important




Most Board members live in a fishbowl environment where the slightest gesture can generate community buzz.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION: What are some of the subtle things that people notice about the Board and the district that sends a message?

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Subtle Communication Messages

- Appearance of schools
- Conduct at board meetings
- Availability to constituents
- Board involvement in civic and school activities
- Pride and work habits of staff and students
- Employees you recognize

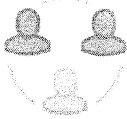


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What is Needed

To ensure that school improvement is done **with** the community and not **to** the community, districts need to develop a well-planned and properly implemented communications program that:

- Informs
- Involves
- Invests




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Tonight's Program

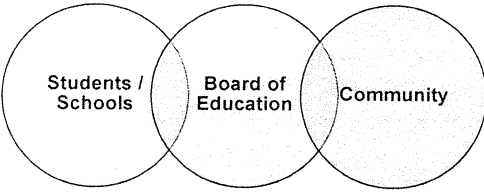
Focuses on the key factors in effective communication to win community support and understanding.

- Board is accountable for
 - Dual role of representing both schools and community.
 - Insight into and influence on public opinion of public education.
 - Moral and legal obligation to communicate reasons for actions.



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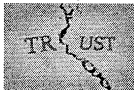
Board's Dual Role – representing both students and community



Boards need to reach out to key constituencies in the community and play a visible role in building internal climate.

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Why is Dual Role so Important?


40 Years Ago	Now
<p>Widespread fundamental trust in public schools</p> <p>I ♥ MY PUBLIC SCHOOL</p>	<p>Work for support. Show me what you are doing. Prove not wasting hard-earned money.</p> 

Public skepticism of basic competence of public schools inevitably takes toll on internal culture of schools.


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Board's Role

A strong communications plan and structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders allows you to:



Create public opinion



Not react to it

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Board's Role

Strengthen district's public image	Build relationships	Foster positive internal climate
Policy commitment	Key Communicators Stakeholder analysis	Agreement on high priority concerns
Vision statement	Develop engagement plan framework	Support superintendent
Image statement	Monitor effectiveness	Symbolic and ceremonial involvement


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Communications Policy


Why Policy is Needed

- Official commitment to effective school/community relations.
- Puts on record the Board's belief that community's role is no less important than school's role.
- Provides framework to ensure two-way flow of information.

What to Include



- Integrating school, home and community
- Use of available media
- Gathering of information about public attitudes
- Working with the media
- Provide for continuous flow of information
- Guidelines for public participation





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Vision Statement

- The district's vision statement paints a clear picture of long-term district aspirations.
- Enables the community to understand the district in more inspirational terms.
- Community is involved in shaping
- Should appear in district communications.






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Image Statement

Without knowing how you want your district to be perceived, how can you determine the messages?



Discuss at your table:

We want to be seen as




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Image Statement


- Provides guidance in developing key messages.
- Internal tool – never published/quoted.
- Board should ask, “Are we really getting across the message that our district is making a huge contribution to our community’s quality of life and economic development?”
- How do we know – surveys, focus groups, etc.



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Develop Stakeholder Relations

Now that you have your Policy and vision/ image statements ...

 Discuss at your table:

With what constituent/stakeholder groups must a Board regularly and purposefully communicate?

Consider: internal, external, special constituencies

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Identifying your Publics

Some examples

Internal	External	Special Constituencies
<input type="checkbox"/> Other board members	<input type="checkbox"/> Parents and taxpayers	<input type="checkbox"/> State/national school boards
<input type="checkbox"/> Superintendent	<input type="checkbox"/> Town/city council	<input type="checkbox"/> Booster clubs
<input type="checkbox"/> Other administrators	<input type="checkbox"/> Civic organizations	<input type="checkbox"/> Student council
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff	<input type="checkbox"/> County/state/federal govt	<input type="checkbox"/> Education associations
<input type="checkbox"/> Students	<input type="checkbox"/> Police, health, fire depts	<input type="checkbox"/> PTA/PTO
<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteers	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious groups	<input type="checkbox"/> Neighboring school boards
<input type="checkbox"/> Coaches	<input type="checkbox"/> Business community	<input type="checkbox"/> Bond/election committees
<input type="checkbox"/> Advisory groups	<input type="checkbox"/> Vendors	

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Stakeholder Analysis

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- ```
graph TD; A((1)) --- B((2)); B --- C((3)); C --- D((4)); D --- E((5)); E --- F((6));
```
1. Make list of stakeholders
  2. Identify stakes involved for district
  3. Select 10 – 15 with highest stakes
  4. Quid pro quo analysis – what does district need/want and what does stakeholder need/want in return.
  5. Administration develops strategies to manage relationships
  6. Board monitors progress



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## What to Avoid

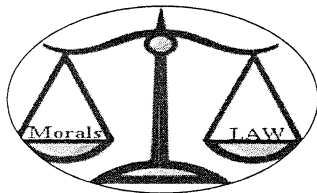
1. Taking the community for granted – assume good works speak for themselves and invest little in image building and external relations.
2. Taking action on public relations only when need extraordinary support or responding to a crisis.
3. Taking a shallow approach to communicating the district's value to the community.



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we never stop doing things.

## Legal and Moral Obligations




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### Board Meetings




The way you conduct your board meetings speaks volumes!


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### Open Public Meetings Act

- What can / cannot be discussed in a closed session
- Provision for public comment at all meetings
- Voting in public
- When is it a meeting? Telephone conferencing, emails, messaging

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## Moral Obligations

- Open and transparent
  - All board members engaged and informed of proceedings
  - Concerns are addressed
  - Demonstrate skills in listening
  - Respectful of public and informative
  - Build and maintain trust
  - Board's impact on public opinion and staff morale
- 
- A black and white icon of a balance scale, symbolizing justice, equity, or fairness. It has two pans hanging from a central beam, which is supported by a single pillar.



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[www.mshz.org](http://www.mshz.org)

Consider this...

The Yourtown BOE held an executive session to review a personnel appointment prior to the regular meeting. The board then convened to open session. The appointment did not appear on the agenda. Halfway through the meeting, the board secretary handed out the addendum for the personnel appointment and the board voted on the appointment.



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[www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com)

## Board Policy



- Meeting protocol—do we have a policy? Do we follow our policy?
- Addendums—procedure
- Committee reports-what do we know and when do we know it?
- Oversight through policy

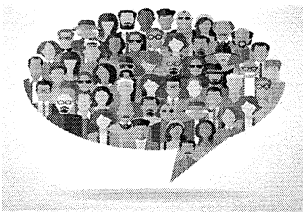



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### Public Comment

- Public comment—not debate
- How to respond appropriately

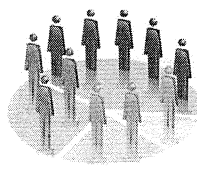



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### What does the Public Really Want?

Silent Majority  
Vs  
Vocal Minority




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### Consider this...

Dave is a member of the Yourtown BOE and his son is a wrestler. Dave has been involved with the local wrestling association for a long time. The district was seeking a new wrestling coach and Dave knew the perfect person. He also enlisted some parents to come to a BOE meeting and speak on behalf of this person...


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### The Right Way




- Understand the issue
- Gather facts
- Discuss within the board with an open mind
- Make an informed and educated decision


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### The Other Way


Using the public to bolster your own opinion.




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### Support the decision of the board



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### Consider this...

At a recent public meeting of Yourtown BOE there was no public present. During the meeting, the Superintendent spoke with the board concerning implementing "Standards Based" report cards. This was a preliminary discussion. The fallout the next day included numerous emails and calls from staff and a blistering social media discussion.



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### Board's Role / Staff Communication

- What is the appropriate process?
- Chain of command (Chain of Communication)
- Why is this important?



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### Internal Communication

Knowing that the superintendent is responsible for all internal operations, what impact can the Board have on internal communication?



- Reach agreement with superintendent on highest priority culture and climate concerns.
- Symbolic/ceremonial involvement




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## Internal Communication

Examples of symbolic/ceremonial opportunities:

- Attend/speak at convocation and graduation
  - Awards ceremonies
  - Attend district functions
  - Provide visible support to superintendent when launching new initiatives (e.g. stand together)
- 



Large group – share other examples



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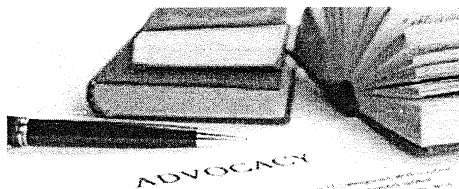
**Board / Superintendent  
Communication**

- Clear and open lines of communication—both ways
- No surprises
- Build and work as a team
- Model the behavior you expect



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## Include Advocacy in Your Communications Plan




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### Why Should You Advocate?

- You make decisions that affect the education of children in your community. But...
- Decisions made in Trenton, and Washington, DC affect your district's:
  - Level of service to school-age children
  - Programs to help children achieve success
  - Operations
  - Budget
  - Staffing

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### Advocacy is Not “Arm Twisting”

Advocacy is about speaking up (internal)

- Share your district's success stories
- You know what works on the ground
- Increase understanding about how their decisions impact kids in the classroom

Advocacy is about relationships (external)

- Mobilize your parents
- Get to know legislators and their staff
- Understand the process, players, and issues

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### Build Local Advocacy into Your Communications Plan

- Create a plan with goals, objectives, strategies
- Identify what you can do individually, what you need others to do
- Establish timing that reflects decision-making cycles – what they need to know from you and when
- Target parents, legislators, community partners, natural allies, potential opponents
- Pick 2-3 key issues critical to the district
- Develop messages, materials and a 30-second “elevator” speech related to those issues

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## Activity for Advocacy

Using the handout at your tables:

1. Identify which topics, if any, of the legislative updates would warrant communication with parents and/or their community
2. Identify what specific information they would highlight and why
3. Develop talking points/elevator pitch (60 seconds) that all board members could use to speak with community/parents about advocating
4. Each small group will share with the larger group



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## Communications Checklist

For each NO answer – more work is needed.



Policy specifying communication goals?



Commitment to identify and communicate with internal and external publics?



Meaningful stakeholder participation and feedback opportunities?



Plan for implementation?



Commitment of resources – time and money?



Other areas not discussed tonight – crisis communications and provision for dealing with news media?



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## Resources

- "School Communication Planning Guide":  
<http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/296999/School-Communication-Planning-Guide.pdf>.
- National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) :  
<https://www.nspira.org/files/docs/Sample%20Communication%20Plan.pdf>.
- NJSBA School Leader article:  
<https://www.njsba.org/news-publications/school-leader/januaryfebruary-2014-volume-44-4/a-winning-combination-local-business-and-schools/>.



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## Thank you to ...

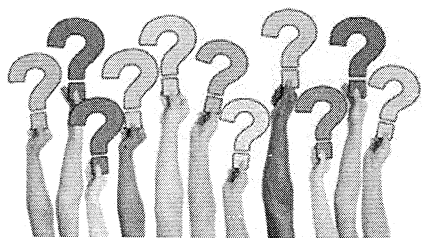
National School Boards Association. (2006). *Becoming a better board member: A guide to effective school service*. Alexandria, VA. Author: NSBA

*Five Habits of High-Impact School Boards* by Doug Eadie (2004).



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Waxing nights (20%)



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## EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS EFFORTS

The following checklist will help your board identify strengths and weaknesses in your efforts to communicate.

1. Does the board have a policy specifying communications goals and objectives?
2. Is there a step-by-step plan for implementing this policy that specifies the components of and responsibilities for each aspects of the communications program?
3. Does the plan have a commitment to identify and communicate with both internal and external school Publics?
4. Does it include provisions for dealing effectively with the news media?
5. Does it include a process for planning and executing crises communications?
6. Have adequate provisions been made in the budget to staff and operate those parts of the plan delegated to the administration?
7. Has the board provided for a professional public information director or assigned a management level individual to oversee implementation of the program?
8. Has the board properly delegated and then assumed a background role of monitoring the implementation and functions of the communications program?
9. Has it directed the superintendent to report regularly on the communications program?
10. Has it emphasized the importance of communications throughout the school community?
11. Is communications training included in the in-service programs for district employees?
12. Does the district have a publication directed to its employees?
13. Is there a publication directed to patrons of the district, including those who do not have children in the school?
14. Does the board policy plan and provide for feedback from both internal and external publics?
15. Does the board use it meetings as a vehicle for communication and feedback?
16. Does the communications program include citizen involvement components, such as advisory committees and key communicators?
17. Does the plan include guidelines for individual board member communication?
18. Do board members participate in school and community events and stay in touch with other public service and government agencies?
19. Does the board's plan specify an appropriate chain of command for resolving complaints or grievances raised by school staff or patrons?
20. Are all communications efforts evaluated at least annually?
21. Does the board have a designated spokesperson?
22. Does the board have a designated spokesperson to speak for the schools?
23. Does the public have easy access to board agendas, policy documents, financial data, and other public information?
24. Are public hearings or internal and external surveys conducted before the board takes action on major policy issues and on items such as the budget, changes in attendance boundaries, and school closings?

# Stakeholder Groups for Schools

**Stakeholder - defined as a person or group that has an investment, share, or interest in something, as a business or industry.**

Groups of stakeholders for your school / school district may include:

Parents  
Guardians  
Teachers  
Staff (all school/district staff)  
Administrators  
Students  
Community Members  
PreSchools / Nursery Schools  
Township Government Officials  
Clergy / Ministerium / Rabbinical Council  
Business Owners  
Fire Fighters  
Police Officers  
Alumni  
Business owners including those involved in providing internships for students  
Community leaders  
Community groups  
School Booster Clubs  
Community Education staff / students  
Partners in education (i.e., university or college staff)  
Professional organizations  
Parents / community members from your sending district(s)

Chamber of Commerce  
Non-Profit Directors  
Social Service Providers  
Sports organizations in your town  
Leaders of Boy Scouts / Girl Scouts  
Donors to your school / education foundation  
Educational experts who live in your community  
Community organizations specific to your community, i.e., Horseman's Association, Carriage Association, Cycling Association, Men's or Women's Clubs, Mom's of Multiples, Junior League, etc.  
Senior Citizens Groups  
Hospital Auxiliary  
Drug Alliance  
Elks, Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.  
Township Historic Association  
School District Education Foundation leadership and members  
Veterans Association  
Masons  
Eastern Star  
Political Groups  
Neighborhood improvement groups, etc.

**These groups can provide valuable input into your strategic planning process.**

